

Criteria for the Identification of Students with Speech/Language Impairments

Recognizing the many factors involved in appropriately identifying students with Speech/Language Impairments (SLI), Middlesex County Public Schools' Office of Special Education, has established criteria to be used by eligibility committees for the purpose of decision-making.

Definition:

Regulations Governing Special Education Programs For Children With Disabilities in Virginia (2009, defines a “**Speech or Language Impairment**” as “a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment, that adversely affects a child’s education”.

Oral communication competence is a vital prerequisite for social interaction and recognition of self-worth, as well as academic and vocational progress. It is an established fact that the preschool years are critical for the development of fundamental communication skills. Because these skills are essentially mastered by the normally developing child by age five, and since academic programming begins at age five or six, the responsibilities of the speech-language pathologists include early identification of, and intervention with, children who exhibit delay or impairment of speech and language skills. Without these services, children who have difficulty with reception, processing, and/or expression of speech and language may not reach their full potential as contributing members of society.

Speech-Language pathology services include the following:

1. Identification of children with speech or language impairments.
2. Diagnosis and appraisal of specific speech or language impairments.
3. Referral for medical or other professional attention necessary for the habilitation of speech or language impairments.
4. Provision of speech and language services for the habilitation or prevention of communicative impairments.
5. Counseling and guidance of parents, children, and teachers regarding speech and language impairments.

In the normal developmental process, oral/aural skills develop before general academic skills such as reading, writing, and computation. When the underlying linguistic skills are delayed or impaired, academic achievement is often affected.

Social skills are also supported by effective communication skills. A child’s social relationships (both with peers and with adults in the immediate environment) and self-image are, in many instances, strongly influenced by the level of communication.

State Definition:

Speech Impairment is defined in the federal and state regulations as follows:
“Speech or language impaired means a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment, which adversely affects a child’s educational performance.”

Among other generally accepted explanations of this term, the following may help to interpret the dimensions of the problem:

1. Speech disorders are characterized by impairment in one or more of the following:
 - a. Production of speech sounds (articulation), phonology
 - b. Maintenance of speech rhythm and rate (fluency)
 - c. Control of vocal production
2. Language delays and/or impairments are characterized by any difficulty with the understanding and/or use of the spoken and/or written language.
3. Educational performance is characterized by academic/developmental progress, social/emotional functioning and/or vocational performance.

Students whose native language is not English and students whose native dialect differs from Standard English are not considered to have a speech or language impairment unless they qualify under the definitions as stated above. It is important that students receive an assessment in their native language. Personnel or outside resource persons trained in a specific language may need to assist the speech-language pathologist with the evaluation.

Assessments:

If the student is suspected of having a Speech and Language Impairment, then assessments should include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Speech-Language – Written report of an evaluation which may assess the child’s articulation, voice, fluency, and expressive and receptive language skills.
- Hearing Screening – Written report to assess the child’s hearing.
- Observation – Written report of the child’s academic performance and behavior in the child’s learning environment (including the general education classroom setting) to document the child’s academic performance and behavior in the areas of difficulty. NOTE: This observation should take place in a class where

perceived weaknesses are indicated. *In case of a child less than school age or out of school, a group member shall observe the child in an environment appropriate for a child of that age.

- Classroom Educational Documentation - Written report from classroom teacher(s) describing the child's level of academic, developmental, social, or adaptive level of functioning including strengths, weaknesses, and other factors which affect educational performance.

Eligibility Criteria:

The following criteria should be met when determining whether a student with a speech-language impairment requires special education services:

1. The child's age falls within 2-21 years of age, inclusive.
2. The student has a speech or language impairment level that indicates the presence of a disability.
3. The student's educational progress is adversely affected by the speech language impairment.
4. The student needs specialized instruction and related services (services required to benefit from special education).

NOTE: The severity rating scale should be utilized where appropriate.

Speech/Language Severity Rating Scale

Name _____ DOB _____

Date Completed _____ Speech/Language Pathologist _____

Record points assigned for each factor considered in each area.

AREAS	FACTORS CONSIDERED				TOTAL POINTS	OVERALL FUNCTIONAL LEVEL
	A	B	C	D		
Articulation						
Language						
Voice						
Fluency						

**Do not add or average separate rating scales to determine severity.
See individual severity rating scales for full description of factors considered and overall functional levels.**

Overall Functional Level		
Level 0	0-3 points	No apparent problem
Level 1	4-6 points	Mild
Level 2	7-9 points	Moderate
Level 3	10-12 points	Severe

The presence of a severity rating on any of the four scales does not guarantee eligibility; rather, it describes the result of the speech-language assessment in consistent terms. The eligibility committee may consider the severity rating, in conjunction with other information, as it determines eligibility.

Eligibility is based on(1) the presence of a speech-language impairment
 (2) that has an adverse educational impact, and
 (3) that results in the need for special education (specialized instruction) and related services (services to benefit from special education).

A particular severity rating does not specify or predict a certain level of service.